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661 687 665 various members of the so-called 'Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites' which was allegedly led by Bukharin. In the Far East itself the Soviet Government staged a big trial of leading railway officials working on the Amur railway line, a sector of the Trans-Siberian railway. The trial took place in the town of Svobodny. All forty-four defendants were sentenced to death as 'Japanese spies'. They included the deputy head of the Amur railway line, the head of its planning department, the deputy head of the locomotive service and many other people of similar standing in the Far Eastern railway transport.[5] The sentence of Svobodny had considerable repercussions throughout the F.E.T. Sweeping changes took place not only in the top leadership of the Far Eastern railways but also among the rank and file of the railwaymen. Demobilized soldiers were rapidly trained for the railway and called upon to fill the gaps opened by the purges.

The man who, in 1937, carried out the purge in the Soviet Far East was a complete newcomer to the territory. His name was Vareikis, he was Lithuanian-born and had occupied various important positions in European Russia, as party secretary first of Voronezh and later of Stalingrad. He was also a member of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party. When he arrived in Khabarovsk in the spring of 1937 he seemed to possess the full confidence of Stalin, but by the end of the year he had lost it. He was charged with surrounding himself with spies and white guardists. A case in point was the editor of the largest Far Eastern newspaper *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda* (Far Eastern Star), Shver, who was expelled from the party by a special decision of the Central Committee taken at the beginning of October.[6] Vareikis survived his friend only by a few days.

THE PURGE OF THE FAR EASTERN ARMY

661 701 The disgrace of Vareikis and his supporters carried the disintegration of the party apparatus in the Far East a step further. Only one important force continued to exist in the F.E.T., the Special Far Eastern Army and its commander, Marshal Vasily Konstantinovich Blyukher. But it was clear that this last bulwark of Far Eastern 'autonomism' would, sooner or later, be affected by the big Stalinist clean up of Russia's military leadership. One of the defendants of the Tukhachevsky trial of June 1937, the commander of the Byelorussian Military District, Uborevich, had had important connections with the Far East. In 1922 he had been the liberator of Vladivostok and he had stayed in the F.E.T. for several years. There was another military person who was closely linked with Stalin's Far Eastern opponents, Gamarnik, the chief of the Political Administration of the Red Army and an Assistant People's Commissar for Defence. Had he not committed suicide he would most

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certainly have appeared in the Tukhachevsky trial. Gamarnik's presence in the Far East was frequently mentioned in the Soviet Press, the last time late in 1936, when he attended the autumn manœuvres of the OKDVA.[7] One of the last pictures which Soviet newspapers published of Gamarnik showed him with the Far Eastern deputies to the Eighth Congress of Soviets.[8] So there is no doubt that Gamarnik stood in close personal contact with some of the leading personalities of the F.E.T. It is possible that he had closer contacts with the civilian than with the military opposition in the Far East. This might explain why his fall from favour did not harm the Special Far Eastern Army directly, except for its political departments which were under Gamarnik's orders.[9] At any rate, the Tukhachevsky-Gamarnik *affaire* did not affect Blyukher's prestige immediately. Blyukher was even one of the judges who sent Tukhachevsky and his associates to the gallows: these judges, who also included Marshal Timoshenko and Marshal Budyonny, were officially referred to as 'the flower of our glorious army'.[10] In the months after the Tukhachevsky trial they served Bolshevik propaganda as examples that Stalin had not wiped out Russia'a entire military leadership.

It seems that in the winter of 1937–38, Blyukher and his army reached the culminating point of their power in the Far Eastern Territory. The influence of Blyukher and his army was particularly visible in the elections which took place in December 1937 for the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., the first to be held under the new Stalin Constitution. Out of the nine deputies which the F.E.T. sent to the Soviet of the Union four belonged to the OKDVA, including Blyukher himself and his deputy, Mikhail Karpovich Levandovsky, who commanded the troops of the maritime region around Vladivostok. The fifth deputy, a submarine commander, represented the Pacific Fleet.* The party, the administration and the N.K.V.D.† had one deputy each. Only the ninth deputy represented the common people. He was a Stakhanovite worker in the timber industry.

When the Soviet parliament met in January 1938 Blyukher was elected a member of its presidium. In the following month, on Red Army Day, he was awarded the 'Order of Lenin'. At the end of May a meeting of 6,500 workers and peasants nominated him as a candidate for the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the R.S.F.S.R.[11] Until the

* The Soviet Pacific Fleet was built up between 1932 and 1937. In the first years of the Soviet régime a Russian Pacific Fleet was as good as non-existent; until 1932 it included but one single gun-boat. Describing the situation at the time of the arrival in Vladivostok of the first Red Navy commander in the Pacific, M. V. Viktoroy, *Pravda* said pointedly 'There was a commander, there was also a Pacific, but no Pacific Fleet' (*Pravda*, March 29th, 1937.) It was Viktorov's achievement to create a Soviet Pacific Fleet in a matter of four to five years. He too was eliminated in the big clean-up of 1937-38.

† The N.K.V.D., the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, later Ministry for Internal Affairs (M.V.D.) is the ministry responsible for the Soviet police.

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end of July, Blyukher still appeared in public and was still in command in the Soviet Far East, but two rather strange things had happened. First, a carefully prepared party conference of the OKDVA, which was scheduled for the beginning of June, was cancelled at the last minute; and secondly, the OKDVA itself was suddenly renamed 'Far Eastern Front' ('Dalnevostochnii Krasnoznamyonnii Front'). The change occurred between July 5th and 6th, and must have greatly puzzled the Soviet public, which was as familiar with the initials 'OKDVA' as with U.S.S.R., N.K.V.D. and R.S.F.S.R.

The actual disappearance of Blyukher coincides with some major border incidents which the Japanese provoked on Lake Khasan during the last days of July and the beginning of August. The Soviet armed forces remained in control of the situation and killed over 400 Japanese. On the whole the incident on Lake Khasan was rather welcome to the Kremlin, for it gave the government the opportunity to prove that the efficiency of the army was not impaired by the purge. Moreover, the [208] 'defeat of the samurais', as official propaganda styled the historic episode on the Manchurian border, supplied the pretext for a big campaign to strengthen the morale of the Soviet rear. All over the Soviet Union meetings were held in factories, collective farms and offices protesting against the Japanese aggression and sending greetings to the Soviet armed forces who were watching over the security of the Far Eastern borders. None of the resolutions adopted at these meetings contained the slightest reference to the once so popular Marshal Blyukher. The press gave all the credit for the speedy liquidation of the Khasan Lake incident to rank and file soldiers and junior officers, as if no general had been connected with the operation. Only considerably later was the new commander in the Far East mentioned – Grigory Mikhailovich Shtern.[12]

What happened to Blyukher and why it happened was never officially stated, except, perhaps, for some general cryptic remarks made by the Head of the Political Administration of the Red Army, Mekhlis, and by Blyukher's successor. The former told the party conference of the 'First Separate Army',* in September 1938, that the plotters among the party members of the Far Eastern Army had been 'smashed and destroyed'. Shtern was a little more explicit when, in addressing the Eighteenth Party Congress, he referred to 'traitors, spies and monsters' who had infiltrated into responsible positions in the Far Eastern armies.

The disgrace of the Marshal was not a local event of the Soviet Far East, but one of national importance for Soviet Russia. Blyukher was a potential Russian Bonaparte, more dangerous to Stalin than even

* The 'First Separate Army' ('Pervaya Otdelnaya Krasnoznamyonnaya Armiya') was a new name for the purged OKDVA, the term 'Far Eastern Front' being used for a few weeks only.

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Marshal Tukhachevsky. The latter was primarily a soldier, but Blyukher was both soldier and political leader. Unlike Tukhachevsky, Blyukher was of proletarian origin – he had started life as a shop-assistant in St. Petersburg and had later become a metalworker – and his popularity with the Russian working class was secure. Unlike Tukhachevsky, Blyukher had suffered under the Czarist régime. He had joined the Bolshevik Party a whole year before the October Revolution, early enough to lay claim to the once so honourable title of 'Old Bolshevik'. Although only a private in the Czarist army in which Tukhachevsky had served as an officer, Blyukher emerged as one of the great military commanders of the young Soviet State during the Civil War. In 1918, by his remarkable expedition across the Ural mountains, he secured the victory of the Revolution on what was then the 'Eastern Front'. For this outstanding feat he was awarded the Order of the Red Banner. He was the first person to receive this decoration.[13]

Blyukher's association with the Soviet Far East, which became the main reason for his prominence, started in 1921. He commanded that heroic march to the Pacific Ocean which included such momentous events of the Russian Civil War as the storming of the heavily fortified white-guard stronghold, Volochayevka, the capture of Khabarovsk, and the final liquidation of Japanese intervention.

For Russia as a whole the elimination of Blyukher meant that Stalin's last potential competitor, a man who might have easily become more popular than he, had gone. For the Soviet Far East it meant the end of a historic period and it also resulted in a rewriting of its past history. Naturally, Blyukher's real historic feats remained unchanged, but the régime did its best to strike his name from history as it lives on in the minds of the people, particularly in the minds of the rising generation. It is difficult to write the history of the Soviet Far East up to 1938 without mentioning Blyukher, but Stalin's historians have achieved this task. Blyukher's name is now left out of all accounts of the Russian Civil War. The first edition of the *Large Soviet Encyclopedia*, in its volume, Number 6, which was published in 1930, described Blyukher as 'one of the outstanding personalities of the Red Army'. The second edition of the *Large Soviet Encyclopedia*, which was published after the Second World War, did not mention him at all.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE N.K.V.D.

The reorganization of the 'Special Far Eastern Army' and the disgrace of its commander were followed by the abolition of the Far Eastern Territory. It may be argued that this latter measure was not especially prompted by the peculiarities of the situation in the Far East. The Soviet Government had gradually abolished all the original large